

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 1

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR  
22 March 1985

# Iraq turns up the heat on Iran

By Jim Muir  
Special to The Christian Science Monitor

Nicosia, Cyprus

Following the crushing defeat of an Iranian ground offensive earlier this week, Iraq is using every means at its disposal to pressure Tehran to make peace.

Since the sharp escalation of war began March 4, Iraqi air raids and long-range missile strikes have caused damage and civilian casualties in more than 20 Iranian cities, by Tehran's own admission.

On Thursday, Iraq warned the residents of Ahvaz to evacuate the city by midday Sunday, or risk being caught in

air raids and missile strikes aimed at destroying "important economic targets" there. Ahvaz is the regional capital of Iran's oil-bearing Khuzestan Province.

Iraq's evident determination to maximize pressure of all kinds on Tehran, countered by Iran's continuing refusal to contemplate peace with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, has led to rising tension throughout the Gulf. The Arab Gulf states expect the Iranians will respond in some way to the Iraqi campaign.

The effectiveness of the Iraqi campaign could be gauged by the exodus from Iran

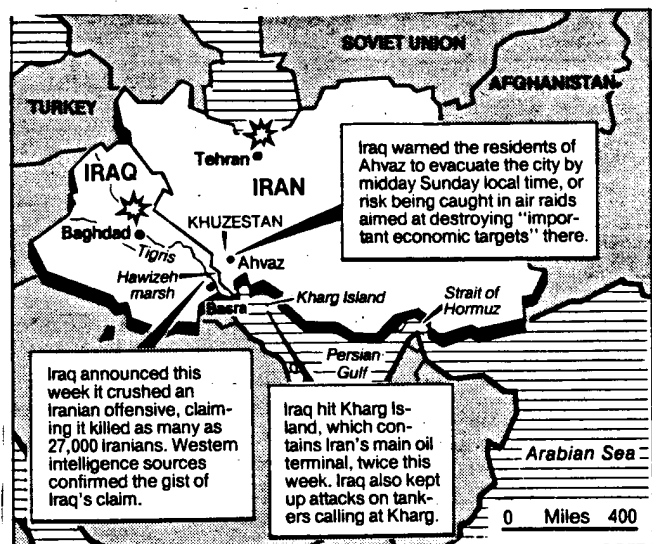
of hundreds of foreign nationals before an Iraqi blockade of Iranian airspace went into effect Tuesday. Many of the departing foreigners were engaged in important economic projects, and their loss is sure to spell another blow to Iranian fortunes.

Since the air blockade took effect, one or two internal flights have been operating. The national airline of Iran's Arab ally, Syria, was the only outside airline willing to brave the threat and keep up its flights to Tehran. The blockade is likely to dampen Iranian morale further.

Iraq's campaign to disrupt Iranian oil exports has also been redoubled. Iraq has kept up its attacks on tankers calling at Iran's main oil terminal on Kharg Island. Particularly significant was Sunday's attack on the tanker Akarita, one of a handful of tankers shuttling oil between Kharg and a terminal further south and beyond range of Iraqi air strikes.

On Tuesday and Wednesday two direct attacks on Kharg itself were independently reported. In the first, an explosion reportedly wrecked a storage tank and killed 12 people. On Wednesday, shipping sources said seven crewmen were killed when a missile hit an oilfield supply ship. Onshore installations were not reported damaged.

Perhaps significantly, the Iraqis did not claim responsibility for the direct hits on Kharg Island. For some months, oil industry sources have referred to a "veto" by



the Gulf Cooperation Council that has restrained a concerted Iraqi attempt to destroy the terminal. The sources believe the six-nation GCC, which groups the conservative Arab oil states and supports Iraq in the war, has so far prevailed on Baghdad not to do it, for fear of Iranian reprisals against Saudi and other Arab oil installations on the Gulf's western shores.

Iranian Prime Minister Hossein Mussavi hinted Tuesday at another way in which the crisis could spill over into the wider region.

"Air insecurity is contagious," Mr. Mussavi said in reaction to the Iraqi air blockade, "and could spread to the airspace of the whole region rather than being confined within the borders of Iraq and Iran."

Iran also threatened to carry out missile attacks on Baghdad airport. Despite four recent explosions in Baghdad, which Tehran said were caused by such missiles, observers are still unsure as to whether Iran possesses such weapons. (However, the sudden arrival of Iraqi Foreign Minister Tareq Aziz in Moscow last week prompted speculation that Tehran might have obtained Soviet-made missiles from Syrian or Libyan sources.)

Even so, Iran is clearly ill equipped to answer the Iraqi campaign in kind. Having tried its hand where it is strongest — on the marshy battlefield of southern Iraq — it has apparently suffered another major setback.

Tehran did not challenge or even comment on Iraq's jubilant announcement on Monday that it had thrown back the Iranian offensive and scored a "historic, decisive victory." Iraq claimed that as many as 27,000 Iranians were killed in the abortive onslaught.

Western intelligence sources have confirmed the gist of the Iraqi victory claim, and confirmed that casualties were high.

As Iraqi pressure mounts, there is a clear danger that the Iranians may try increasingly wilder ways of hitting back.